

# FRESHMAN SEMINAR



2025 - 2026



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# Course Description

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Freshman Seminar is a year-long course designed to help students successfully transition to high school while building essential skills for their future. As the foundation of the “Freshman Academy Model,” this course aligns with CRCSD’s Portrait of a Graduate and focuses on key areas such as self-awareness, interpersonal skills, academic habits for success, career and college planning, and community engagement.

Throughout the year, students will develop employability skills, explore their strengths and interests, and gain valuable insights to support their academic and personal growth. Freshman Seminar ensures that students start high school with confidence and a strong foundation for success.

The seminar course will qualify as a work-based learning course by ensuring students engage in sustained engagement with business partners in order for students to explore potential career paths. These experiences will culminate in two projects through which students showcase their career exploration.



# Course Competencies

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## Self Direction

Self-Direction helps students take charge of their learning journey. It fosters the independence and resilience necessary to navigate academic and professional challenges.

- Take initiative to set goals and priorities to achieve maximum productivity.
- Leverage inquisitiveness, resourcefulness, and positivity.

## Cultural Agility

Cultural Agility prepares students to excel in diverse settings. It boosts understanding and respect for differing perspectives, promoting effective communication and collaboration.

- Assess situations to navigate cultural, structural, and situational norms.
- Read context and identify stakeholders' perspectives to foster positive relationships.

## Creativity & Innovation

Creativity and Innovation encourages ingenuity and adaptability. It fosters a culture of innovation necessary for driving progress.

- Determine opportunities to use original thoughts and approaches.
- Creates or disrupts status quo or assumptions.
- Cultivate a mindset of continuous improvement and exploration.

## Effective Collaboration

Effective Collaboration equips students with teamwork skills crucial for navigating diverse group dynamics. It helps students achieve common goals in academic and professional settings.

- Encourage cooperation to leverage diverse perspectives and achieve collective goals.
- Foster an inclusive and open environment for productive teamwork.

## Engaging Communication

Engaging Communication enhances students' ability to express ideas persuasively. It fosters effective academic, professional, and personal communication, nurturing stronger relationships.

- Transfer information through appropriate channels to influence desired outcomes.
- Articulate a position confidently and compassionately, drawing from knowledge and experiences.

## Critical & Analytical Thinking

Critical & Analytical Thinking amplifies students' problem-solving ability, enabling them to make well-informed decisions.

- Use logic, research, data, and intuition to break down complex problems.
- Determine feasible strategies for solutions through observation, evaluation, and reflection.



# First Semester Units & Project

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## Semester 1 Project Description

In this project, students will explore various career pathways, learn about different professions, and reflect on their interests and goals. They will engage in surveys, hear from guest speakers, and participate in job-shadowing experiences to gain valuable insights into different career fields. The project will conclude with a presentation where students will share their exploration activities, personal reflections, future career aspirations, and the career pathway they plan to pursue.

## Unit #1: Academic Expectations

### Topic: Difference between Middle School & High School

- Students will understand the importance of grades/GPA and how they impact their eligibility for extracurricular activities.
- Students will understand the impact that attendance has on their grades, growth, and opportunities.
- Students will be able to understand what is a passing grade and the awarding of course credits, and reflect on their academic behaviors.

### Topic: Study Skills

- Students will learn various time management skills and through practice they will identify which skill best fits their learning style.
- Students will learn and apply various organization skills to their school work & home life.
- Students will explore ways to prioritize tasks and apply strategies for school, home, and work.

### Topic: Future-Ready Skills

- Students will work collaboratively to solve complex problems.

### Topic: Communication

- Students will understand and reflect on their communication style.
- Students will practice how to communicate through email and verbal interactions to advocate for their needs.

### Major Unit Activities:

- Students will apply skills of organization, time management, self-advocacy, ect. to their school work.
- Explore various ways of effective communication both independently and with others and apply those to current situations/challenges



## Unit #2: Personal Development

### Topic: Personal Care & Development

- Students will identify coping skills and self care strategies to use in various settings to manage their stress levels.
- Students will learn executive functioning skills such as time management, task management, and the importance of organization to manage their course and work load.
- Students will gain a deeper understanding of their own social-emotional competencies through various assessments, exercisers, activities, and discussions of topics such as conflict resolution, self-regulation, decision-making, and communication styles.
- Students will engage in activities to build their resilience and persistence when they face adversity.

### Major Unit Activities:

- Role play, group discussions, and journal reflections
- Project/Presentations on personal toolbox of skills to overcome adversity
- Choose your own adventure activity

## Unit #3: Career Explorations

### Topic: Identifying Strengths, Interests, and Career Pathways

- Students will attend a career fair or other career expo to explore available careers in the area.
- Students will evaluate their personal strengths and interests to identify several possible career paths using Xello and other career interest tools.
- Students will explore the various pathways and course offerings using the CRCSD Program of Studies book to plan for their future high school class selections.

### Major Unit Activities:

- Junior Achievement Career Fair hosted at the Alliant Energy PowerHouse.
- Complete Xello lessons on personal interests.
- Use student's identified strengths to explore career options, as well as backup options.
- Use job finder sites to see what jobs are currently being advertised in the students interest area. What qualifications and characteristics are these employers seeking? How do you find a job opening?
- Explore the College and Career Pathways document to view all options.
- Collaborate with trusted adult to develop thoughts and ideas about pathway and career interests.



## Unit #4: Academics 101

### Topic: College & Career Readiness

- Students will understand how GPA is calculated using model transcripts and scenarios, and the impact of course credits on graduation, and use the knowledge to adjust their academic behaviors.
- Students will identify a pathway/academy of interest to them, and determine what coursework is required in that pathway to graduate, using the CRCSD Program of Studies.
- Students will explore the impact of GPA and course credits to future college or career paths, using Xello or the NCES College Navigator tool.
- Students will construct connections between themselves and potential postsecondary options by attending site visits throughout the semester.
- Students will be able to identify people or resources that connect to their postsecondary interests, and use those people or resources to further their postsecondary planning and work.

### Major Unit Activities:

- Analysis of sample high school transcripts and scenarios group activity.
- Use tools to explore postsecondary interests and entrance requirements at local or state schools.
- College site visits
- Analysis of student's own GPA and high school transcript, reflecting on alignment between status-quo and postsecondary and pathways options
- Plan out courses for yearly registration for courses and selection of a pathway/academy



# Second Semester Units & Project

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## Semester 2 Project Description

Throughout the semester, students will develop their own business idea to address a need or solve a problem in their community. Using creative problem-solving, they will brainstorm business concepts and learn the essential skills needed to launch and manage a successful venture.

With guidance from community volunteers and business mentors, students will gain real-world insights into key aspects of entrepreneurship, including sales, leadership, management, supply chain, finance, and marketing. As they build their businesses, students will collaborate with peers, make strategic decisions, communicate with stakeholders, and apply entrepreneurial skills in a hands-on environment. Students will share their progress with leadership on a weekly basis and create an annual report to summarizing their experience and business outcomes.

## Unit #5: Community Connections

### **Topic: Civic Engagement and Community Awareness.**

- Students will learn the impact of important events in Cedar Rapids History as well as how it affected the development and current state of the community.
- Students will evaluate the current state of representation, accessibility, and belonging within their school and the city of Cedar Rapids, recognizing patterns that may need to be addressed for improvement or growth.
- Students will identify, access, and utilize community resources to meet different needs across their lifetime.
- Students will choose a location to volunteer, volunteer at the site, and then reflect upon the experience and how it connects to a specific area in their community.
- Students will demonstrate their understanding of their community and reflect on what impact they can make as a positive member of society through the completion of a capstone project.

### **Major Unit Activities:**

- Visit a local historical site
- Reading articles, City Council meeting minutes, NAACP & Civil Rights Association reports/data.
- Whole class presentations in groups to talk about one method of resource acquisition.



## Unit #6: Financial Literacy

### Topic: Personal Finances

- Students will understand tools, strategies, and systems used to maintain, monitor, control, and plan the use of their financial resources.
- Students will be able to manage personal finances and learn investment strategies to achieve financial goals.
- Students will understand employee payment structures including hourly rates, salaried positions, and overtime.

### Major Unit Activities:

- Calculating Employee Pay (Hourly & Salary, w/ Overtime)
- Tax simulation activity

## Unit #7: Future Planning

### Topic: Career and Postsecondary Planning

- Students will determine and outline post educational goals.
- Students will reflect on their career exploration and determine if their choice aligns with their long-term goals.
- Students will investigate the salaries, certifications, and job responsibilities of their chosen career.
- Students will plan out a path, both in high school and after, to reach their career and personal goals.
- Students will complete their State of Iowa CPR training requirement.

### Major Unit Activities:

- Create a five-year plan document
- Create a graphic organizer for use when researching careers, salaries, etc.
- Create a poster or flyer about a particular career of interest, based on student's research. These will go on display around the school as a public service.



## Unit #8: Preparing for a Job Application

### Topic: Career Readiness and Employability Skills

- Students will develop an understanding of their career interests and work-related values using lessons in Xello.
- Students will apply knowledge of their strengths and skills to begin crafting a resume and complete a job application.
- Students will learn the proper etiquette and attire for a professional job interview
- Students will develop interpersonal communication skills specific for a job interview and use them to successfully complete a mock interview.

### Major Unit Activities:

- Organize reference names, contact information, and reference letters
- Create a resume
- Guest speakers from local businesses share what they think is important to see/hear in a job interview and how a candidate should conduct themselves.
- Mock interviews with a partner or team
- Explore job openings in the community via Indeed
- Driver's License practice test
- Create a Google site for student portfolio work

# Unit and Competency Alignment

| Competency                                | Skills                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Units                 |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Self-Direction</b>                     | Goal Setting, Time Management, Self Advocacy, Identify Strengths & Weaknesses, Prioritize Tasks, Organizing & Accessing Resources, Staying Goal-Focused, Building Confidence, and Conducting Self Assessments.                                                                                                                     | Units 2, 3, 5, 6, & 7 |
| <b>Effective Collaboration</b>            | Personal & Social Responsibility, Effective Communication (verbal, written, non-verbal), Identifying & Working Toward Shared Goals, Problem-Solving and Solution-Focused Thinking, Recognizing Strengths & Weaknesses, Showing Initiative, Being Proactive & Following Through, Teamwork & Collaboration, and Conflict Resolution. | Units 2 & 3           |
| <b>Critical &amp; Analytical Thinking</b> | Objective Analysis, Making Inferences, Information Management, Strategic Questioning, Research & Information Gathering, and Writing & Application.                                                                                                                                                                                 | Units 3, 2, 5, 6, & 7 |
| <b>Cultural Agility</b>                   | Interpersonal Skills, Stakeholder Awareness, Adaptability, Context Analysis, and Cultural Competency.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Units 2, 5, & 7       |
| <b>Engaging Communication</b>             | Professional Language, Knowing When and How to Communicate, Effective Communication, Email & Digital Communication, In-person Communication, and Understanding Written and Verbal Information.                                                                                                                                     | Units 3, 5, & 8       |
| <b>Creativity &amp; Innovation</b>        | Open-mindedness, Prioritizing Ideas, Reflection, Flexibility, Idea Generation, SWOT Analysis, Understanding Constraints, and Psychological Safety.                                                                                                                                                                                 | Units 1, 2, & 7       |